**Moscow State University**

**Report:**

**British home vs. Russian home**



**Rodina E.S.**

**Moscow**

**2015**

**Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Types of houses in England
3. Modern Russian House
4. Russians' housing problems
5. Conclusion
6. A List of References

**Introduction**

To the British, there’s quite literally “no place like home”. People spend a great deal of time and effort doing DIY (Do It Yourself) which never seems to end. Once the bathroom floor is done, it’s time to change the wallpaper in the living-room or cut the hedge in the back garden. For the British, their homes are an extension of the self and must be constantly improved and individualized.

Most Brits live in terraced houses which were originally called “row houses”. This type of housing was built around factories and industrial centers for manual workers and saved both money and space due to the fact that the houses stood side by side with two shared walls. Terraced houses usually have a back yard or garden and some have a small front garden too. To get from the street to the yard you often have to walk through a passage or “gennel” (a tunnel between the houses). Older houses may also have outside toilets which also stand in rows. These are left over from the time when the British had no inside toilets in their houses.

All houses have a front and back door, which can be used differently depending on the family. Many English people use the back door to go in and out of the house and the front door is only used by the postman to deliver mail (through the letterbox, special hole in the door). The back door may also have a cat flap so that pet cats can come and go as they please. Usually British cats spend most of their time outside and only come home to eat, sleep and get a bit of attention from their owners.

To a Russian it may seem strange that British people allow their cats to run around and get dirty outside then come in and lie on the bed. However, Brits probably have a different view of cleanliness. They don’t change their clothes when they get home and only old people wear pajamas and slippers. Perhaps this is, in part, due to the fact that the streets are not particularly dirty and they have little snow (usually about 5 days a year) in Britain.

British houses have carpets in almost every room. Most English people even had a fitted carpet in the bathroom which got wet every time someone took a bath! That’s a tradition. This could explain why Brits don’t wear slippers at home. In some houses people don’t even take off their shoes and don’t care too much about cleanliness. In Russia, we sometimes have carpets hanging on the wall!

The Russians find it hard to get used to cold bedrooms in winter. But it´s not the case for the British. It’s expensive to heat their houses and they have no communal heating system like in Russian apartment buildings so they often economies; only turning on the heating between certain times of the day. Brits often go to bed in a cold room, perhaps with a hot-water bottle.

The other unusual thing for Russian people is the fact that the English have two taps – one hot, one cold. When they have a wash, they first put in the plug then add the hot water and then the cold until they get the right temperature they want. Quite a complex process! Russians would probably think this dirty or, at the very least, inconvenient. Russians take a bath and then a shower or a shower and then a bath! In Britain, they either have one or the other but not both! Perhaps this is due to their wanting to save water but a lot is also down to tradition.

**Types of houses in England**

There are various types of housing in Britain. These range from the traditional thatched cottages to modern blocks of flats in the cities. Houses are often described by the period they were built in, for example, Georgian, Victorian, 1930’s or post-war. They are also described by the type of house they are. A *terraced house* is a house joined to another house. A *semi-detached house* is two houses joined together. A *detached house* is a house which has no houses attached to it. A *bungalow* is a one story house, and the word comes from Hindi, the Indian language. The word was introduced into Britain during the British occupation of India. British houses are also described by the number of bedrooms they have, e.g. 3 or 4 bedrooms.

British houses are usually built of brick. Semi-detached houses are usually in the suburbs, which are near the town centre. Terraced houses and blocks of flats are mostly in the town centre. These are often the inner city areas which have the poorest people and the highest crime. Although not always, it depends on whether it is a working class area, or a middle class area. Also the area may have changed over time from an area of rich people to an area of poor people. In such cases (for example, New Cross in London), the big Georgian and Victorian houses have been divided up into lots of flats. Where one large house would have had one family and some servants, it may now have 5-10 families. Most British people love gardens, and this is one reason why so many people prefer to live in houses rather than flats. Actually, about 80% of British people live in houses. About 67% of British people own their houses or flats. The rest are ‘renting’ i.e. living in rented accommodation.

**Modern Russian House**

Living conditions in Russia defer greatly depending on the location. While in the cities people live in apartments, in the countryside everyone has a detached Russian house. Of course, a rich family is likely to have a big modern Russian house in a city's downtown (surprisingly enough, it is the most prestigious place to live), but majority of population would not be able to afford such a house. There are mainly 4 types of Russian housing.

*City Apartment*

Owning a private detached Russian house in a city is a very rare thing. Most people live in apartments (flats) which were built between 1953-1964 when Nikita Khrushchev was the First Secretary of the Communist Party. This Russian housing type has a specific design - it looks like such houses are made of separate blocks, and in general they are very ramshackle and old. Such a building is called a “Khrushchevka”. Khrushchevkas do not provide all dwellers with a garden of their own, however, since they are positioned in a block of four or five buildings, there is usually a playground or in some cases a kindergarten in the area between those buildings, in the central courtyard. These big buildings in Russian cities block up the sky and the sun, so it is hard to see stars or sunsets. Heating, electricity and water are provided by the government for separate fees. After the beginning of a Russian housing construction boom in the last decade, many new, modern and beautiful apartments were built and sold to people. However, the international crisis has interrupted the development of Russian housing.

*Communal Apartment*

A communal, or rather shared apartment is the type of an apartment where several people or even families can live together sharing the same kitchen and bathroom. Usually this is how such a shared apartment looks: there is a long hall in the middle of the apartment; one door of the hall leads to the shared kitchen, and another door leads to the shared bathroom; other doors of the shared apartment lead to the separate or adjoining rooms that can belong to one person or a whole family. Such families cluster together in one shared apartment and take turns to cook in the kitchen, to use the bathroom or to clean the shared area. Some very old apartments of this type may have no showers and baths.

This style of life led to formation of a unique Russian commune culture with commune jokes and mentality. It is cheaper to buy a shared apartment than a normal apartment in Russia, but as Russians say, in such cases, you are shopping for good co-dwellers, or neighbors, rather than for an apartment itself, because the peace and harmony of your coexistence depends on them.

*Country House*

Families in Russian villages, small towns and other countryside have their own houses. Russian housing in the countryside is pretty down in price compared to apartments and houses in the city. Until recently such houses had their own independent heating systems and wells. However, now the Russian government provides Russian housing in the countryside with a gas heating system and a centralized water system for a reasonable price. These houses come with a large piece of land which is enough for a Russian family to grow plants and provide themselves with food. There is also a shed, a hayloft, a crib for a cow, and several enclosures for cattle. Some country houses also have a small summer kitchen which is usually detached from the house and is used in summer. An important role in a Russian household belongs to the Russian banya – Russian sauna, where a Russian family takes steam baths and washes every Saturday. Russian countrymen have several cows, chickens, geese, ducks, sheep, pigs and sometimes a horse. A dog is a faithful guard on such a piece of property. The only problem that such property suffers from is the excessive drinking habits of its owners. Since Russian country life is void of entertainment, Vodka is sometimes the only kind of fun Russian countrymen can have.

*Dacha*

Since owning a house with a garden is something practically impossible for Russian city dwellers, the majority of Russian population has what they call “dacha” in Russia. A dacha is a small country house with some piece of land for a kitchen garden or a tree garden – whatever the owner prefers to grow there. However, one shouldn't confuse them with normal country houses from Russian villages because a dacha is much smaller (sometimes it can be a simple cabin or a one-room house), and it is located in close proximity to the city. Dachas are usually abandoned in winter time. But as soon as spring comes, large crowds of Russian old people and families rush into the Russian countryside to their dachas to take care of their plants and property. Since buying fruit and vegetables can be rather expensive in the city, especially in winter, having a dacha where a large family can grow all kinds of provision is very helpful. People in Russia feel deep connection with the nature, and for some of them going to a dacha is not even about growing things, but about resting in the countryside, swimming in the nearby river and cooking shashlik (Russian kebab) with friends. Many teenagers and young people spend their summer holidays or vacations in dacha villages.

**Russians' housing problems**

Having your own flat is a ticket to marrying and having a family, finding a place in society and looking confidently into the future. Russia is a cold country with severe winters where living in a banana bungalow or cardboard hut would be more like dying. A house in Russia should have thick walls and reliable heating, water supply and sewage systems. Young people in the countryside prefer to build their houses themselves, which is out of the question for the majority of Russians who live in cities.

According to relatively high UN and UNESCO standards, there should be at least 30 square meters per person in a flat or house, and every household should have individual premises of a traditional type. Under international standards, every family member should have a room to himself or herself, with two common rooms.

Russia hopes to attain these standards soon. There were slightly more than 19 square meters per person in Russia at the beginning of this century, but about 60% of urban dwellers had one- and two-room flats with 1.3 persons per room.

More than 70% of families live in separate flats in Russia, but 21% of households in St. Petersburg and 3% in Moscow sill live in flats shared by several families.

The housing market, which appeared in Russia at the beginning of privatization in the early 1990s, has created conditions for solving the housing problem. Nearly 18% of young people said in a poll they had no housing problems. But the other 80% have this problem and it is acute for 25%.

Banking credits are too expensive for the majority of those who want to have a better or bigger flat, which is why the mortgage system, which was created in Russia only several years ago, has not yet created a housing boom.

At the same time, the Russian middle class, which is swelling with university graduates, cannot buy new flats easily. This concerns even quite mature people, because prices are too steep in Russia. Flats in Moscow are on sale at more than $3,000 per square meter, and experts say this is not the limit. A young couple will have to spend their combined income for 10-12 years to buy a standard two-room flat on the market.

Sociological polls have revealed an interesting trend. The housing problem is not as acute for big families where three or four generations share the same flat, as for European-type families of Mom, Dad and one or two kids. Though the situation is objectively worse in big families, they are probably more concerned with getting enough food and clothes. Or maybe they live by "the more the merrier" principle. In the past, Russian log houses had only one room for the whole family, including kids and old folks.

Researchers say that the growth of the consumer demand will make the housing issue important to nearly everyone in Russia. Some will want to live separately from parents and others to have a bigger flat. This is where the proactive national project of building comfortable and affordable housing steps in. Russia has already started building housing for the future.

**Conclusion**

The UK has a very high standard of living – it is a very rich country and the people have always enjoyed a comfortable luxury life. 70% of British have their own houses. Only very few people live in flats. Many British people love old houses and these are often more expensive than modern ones. They also love gardening and you will see gardens everywhere you go: in towns, villages and out in the country. Some are very small with just one tree and a few flowers. Others are enormous with plenty of flowers and enough vegetables and fruit trees. There are a great many different kinds of homes in Britain, but there are not enough! It is often very difficult for young people to find a home when they want to start a family. British homes are usually smaller than Russian homes. But like Russian old people, young families and unmarried people do not usually live together. A big problem in England is the rising cost of houses. In 1989 first-time buyers paid an average of around £40,000, but by 2001 this had more than doubled to £85,000. Research by Halifax shows that there is no town in Britain where average property prices are currently below £100 000.Greater-London is topping the table for the highest average prices, which are likely to push through the £300 000 barrier in the third quarter of the year. The cost of housing in England has increased much faster than people's wages making it impossible for first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder unless they are in especially well-paid jobs, are able to call upon rich relatives or are prepared to buy jointly with friends.

More people are buying their own homes than in the past. About two thirds of the people in England and the rest of Britain either own, or are in the process of buying, their own home. Most others live in houses or flats that they rent from a private landlord, the local council, or housing association. People buying their property almost always pay for it with a special loan called a mortgage, which they must repay, with interest, over a long period of time, usually 25 years. We face the same problems in Russian.

**A List of References**

1. McDowal. An Illustrated History of Britain

2. J. O'Driscoll. Britain: The Country and Its People

3. Kate Fox. Watching the English

4. Brian O’Driscoll. Britain for Learners

5. The Moscow News

6. Russia Beyond The Headlines

7. Rossiyskaya Gazeta

8. Post Articles: British Life: About the House. November 4th, 2011 - Alex Jude.

BLOG. English in Russia.